

PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNITY POLICING STRATEGIES FOR REDUCTION OF CRIME IN COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

Community policing is a paradigm shift established as a bedrock for community partnership in creating a safe and secure environment. It is policing whereby the people take an active part in their own security affairs; the police is not seen as stranger whose presence portends danger but as partners in development and those members of the community are co-producers of justice and quality police service. This indicates the need for involving the community, the local government, and the police to work together to tackle crime, especially in rural communities. One rationale for community involvement in policing is the belief that police alone can neither create nor maintain safe communities as the number of police is not adequate and also, not evenly distributed to the communities. This paper provides justifications for community policing in order to prevent and manage crimes. The paper, therefore, examines the origin of community policing, community policing in Nigeria, the role of community policing for crime prevention, benefits of community policing and the barriers or challenges of implementing effective community policing. Conclusion and recommendations are made based on existing framework presented in this paper.

Keywords: Community; crime; policing; reduction; strategies

Introduction

Community policing is a crime reduction strategy that envisages a closer partnership between responsible members of the community and the police in reducing crime. It is both a philosophy (a way of thinking) and an organizational strategy (a way of carrying out that philosophy) that allows and enables the police and the

community to work together in solving problems of crime, disorder and safety issues in order to improve the quality of life for everyone in the community, (Lee and Haider, 2012). The insecurity in Nigerian community is becoming unbearable as most urban and rural communities are no longer safe.

Hitherto, rural areas are comfortable for relaxation because of the peace and adequate security they enjoy, despite so many challenges. These problems include lack of public utilities, transportation, human services, medical facilities, poverty, among others. Government has failed to tackle these problems facing the rural communities and presently, the issues of insecurity to the rural dwellers are becoming unbearable (Lee and Haider, 2012).

The movement toward community policing in Nigeria is gaining momentum over the years as the government, the police and the community/leaders search for more effective ways to promote public safety and to enhance the quality of life in their neighbourhoods. The presidency, The National Assembly and other policing officials are currently assessing what changes in orientation, organization, and operations will allow them to benefit the communities they serve by improving the quality of the services they provide.

According to Davidson (2010), community policing encompasses a variety of philosophical and practical approaches and is still evolving rapidly. Community policing strategies vary, depending on the needs and responses of the communities involved. However, certain basic principles and considerations are common to all community policing efforts. To date, no succinct overview of community policing exists for practitioners who want to learn to use this wide-ranging approach to address the problems of crime and disorder in their communities. Understanding Community Policing, is the beginning of an effort to bring community policing into focus.

Origin of Community Policing

According to Skogan and Lyons (2006), community policing is considered a popular contemporary policing approach in responding to the decline in public confidence in police; and growing evidence that police forces could not fight crime by themselves. It can be traced back to the introduction of community constables, known as 'bobbies', by Sir Robert Peel, in the newly created Metropolitan London Police District during the early 19th century (Brogden and Nijhar, 2005). The police play a significant role in community policing and instead of being separated, they should rather be joined in partnership with the community.

There are various reasons for which countries started community policing. For instance, in the United States of America (U.S.A), community policing resulted from an overall failure of the police to fight crime, maintain order and service the people (Davidson, 2010). In Argentina, an arms exchange programme in the province of Mendoza provided an entry point to the development of broader community engagement and commitment to security measures (Ginifer, Bourne and Greene, 2004). In Uganda, community policing was initiated in 1989 to contain the political turmoil and social strife that started in 1986. In Tanzania, community policing begun by sungusungu/wasalama traditional defense groups formed by people volunteering to fight cattle rustlers, banditry, murders resulting from cattle rustling, or beliefs in witchcraft in Tabora, Shinyanga, and Mwanza Region in 1981 and later on in Kagera, Mara, and Singida regions in 1982.

In Nigeria, community policing was introduced as a pilot scheme in some

selected states in 2004 as an effort to address mutual antagonisms that had developed between the public and the police force (Department of International Development 2010). Community policing involves problem-solving and community engagement with an emphasis on police-community partnerships to solve the underlying problems of crime, the fear of crime, physical and social disorder, and neighbourhood decay (Palmiotto, 2000).

Similarly, community policing is "a philosophy of policing that promotes community-based problem solving strategies to address the underlying causes of crime and disorder and fear of crime and provides reassurance. It is a process by which crime control is shared, or co-produced with the public, and a means of developing communication with the public, thus, enhancing the quality of life of local communities and building police legitimacy" (Virta, 2006). The primary objective of community policing is positive police-community relationships, which can be achieved through community engagement, and by emphasizing collaboration and prevention (Cordner and Perkins, 2005).

Internationally, it is agreed that community policing needs to be a long term strategy with long-term outcomes to allow for the development of decision making processes and a police culture that fosters the concept (Skogan and Lyons, 2006). They further argued that the practices will vary from place to place to respond to the unique situations faced by communities. Community policing promises that closer alliances between the police and the community will help reduce citizen fear of crime, improve police-community relations, and facilitate more effective responses to community problems. But there are also

drawbacks associated with community policing: such as hostility between the police and residents can hinder productive partnerships; increase in officers' decision making autonomy can lead to greater opportunities for police corruption; and resistance within the police organization can hamper community policing successful implementation.

According to Moore and George (2014), under community policing, the relationship between citizens and the police is supposed to improve. It does appear that increased cooperation between the police and local residents increases satisfaction with police services on both sides, although this is not universal. The success of community policing may prompt area residents to comply with certain government directives because they can see the output of the initiative.

However, recent evaluations of community policing in some countries suggest that the level of community satisfaction with police services varies according to how it is implemented, and the social characteristics of community members (Moore and Kelling, 2015). Though community policing promises to benefit everyone, specific programme may favour particular community interests groups (Skogan and Lyons, 2006). In poor and high crime neighbourhoods, residents may be distrusting the police and rates of community participation may be very low. The benefits of community policing may be highest in these areas, but the challenges the police face in convincing citizens that they are committed to the long-term improvement of the local neighbourhood, in creating productive partnerships, and in mobilizing citizens to get involved in local organizations are also greatest.

According to Bayley, (2005), community policing is a strategy for enlisting the public as partners in controlling and preventing crime. It does this in four basic ways: demonstrating that police give priority by responding to the needs of individuals and communities; consulting with the public in developing local law enforcement and crime prevention agendas; mobilizing the community to participate in crime prevention activities; and adopting a proactive problem-solving approach to crime prevention. According to Coquilhat (2008) there are four elements of an ideal community policing. These include:

5. *philosophical dimension*: The ideas and beliefs that underlie community policing;
6. *strategic dimension*: translates philosophies into action;
7. *tactical dimension*: translates philosophy and strategies into concrete programmes, tactics, and behaviours;
8. *organizational dimension*: support changes to promote community policing; arrive at the role of both the police and that of the community (7).

The concept propagates for positive interactions with all parts of the community to counter the general negative nature of policing, enhanced through techniques such as media campaigns, shop front based officers and accessible mini-stations. It promotes working in partnership with the community and agencies to achieve desired outcomes and developing collaborative and targeted responses to community issues among others (Coquilhat, 2008).

Community and Policing

According to Gbenemene and Adishi (2017), community policing as a social

construct conveys two components: first, that of community and secondly that of policing. The first relates to the entire range of research and theory associated with what constitutes "community" and the second is associated with what actually the police should be accomplishing in the community. The unification of these two concepts into a third is not uncoincidental and would appear in part based on the ability to perceive a third construct which is more powerful than either of the two by itself.

Criminology has long noted that crime, in its most serious forms, is an urban problem. At the ecological level, crime is not evenly distributed throughout the environment. Crimes were assumed to be a larger problem in cities than rural areas but as of today, there are so many criminal activities happening in the rural communities. Historically, criminological researchers have examined the relation of group and community norms to law as a form of social regulation and to the control of deviant and criminal behaviour (Olawale, 2016).

The low levels of law-breaking behaviour are related to the social cohesion of these small groups and the controls, both physical and psychological which the members of the community exert on each other. The idea of community has no single dominant connotation and has been used with the greatest degree of latitude. Henry (2002) noted that "community" is comprised of more than those persons who live within a geographic area and who share ties, whether social or economic. Olawale (2016), asserted that the idea of the community also has a psychological element. In this, he concluded that the community is responsible for socialization, social control, social participation, and mutual support.

Socialization is the transmission of knowledge, values and appropriate patterns of behaviour. Social control includes the processes through which individuals learn and become bound to group norms. Social participation is the range of opportunities in which individuals participate and learn expected patterns of social interaction. Mutual support constitutes the interactive network of supports and obligations that bind the residents of the community together. Only recently has the idea of community reflected the expanded conceptualization of a "sense of community" (Olawale, 2016). The elements of a sense of community include membership, influence, reinforcement, and emotional connection.

Membership provides the residents with a sense of security to take risks in becoming involved with the members of the community in interdependent relations. Influence is the ability to affect the group and its goals. Reinforcement is the support which the individual receives from the group including status, esteem, material goods as well as protection from external threats. Finally, emotional connection relates to the extent to which the bond which members form is emotionally fulfilling and meaningful (Lee and Haider, 2012).

The purpose of this discussion has been to convey the underdeveloped nature of the ideas of community in community policing. In an insightful analysis of the different models of policing, it was noted that community policing derives its political support from the community and its legitimacy from the law. It provides broad services, going beyond strict law enforcement. It is equally concerned with order maintenance activities that attempt to control the visible signs of disorder which

negatively affect the quality of life in many communities.

Community Policing and Crime Prevention

The seemingly lack of a precise definition of community policing and vague measures of success has contributed to the difficulties in determining its effectiveness (Gbenemene and Adishi, 2017). In addition, the complex nature of community policing limits the ability to provide sufficient evidence of either success or failure. However, literature shows a number of benefits of implementing community policing. According to Mayhill (2007) and Davidson (2010), the benefits of community policing include:

1. improving police-community relationships and community perceptions of police;
2. increasing community capacity to deal with issues;
3. changing officers' attitudes and behaviours;
4. increasing perceptions of safety; and
5. reducing crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour.

Improving police-community relationships and community perceptions of police:

- Opportunity to increase public accountability through participation.
- A number of community policing initiatives illustrate positive results in improving community relationships and perceptions of police.
- Community and police work towards shared goals.

Increasing community capacity to deal with issues:

9. Empowers the community to respond to community concerns.

10. Positive attitudes in the community to interact, deal with and solve problems.
11. Opportunity for community grassroots support for police.

Changing police officers' attitudes and behaviour

- Police officers increase interaction with and confidence of the community.
- Police and community develop positive relationships.
- Community policing is linked to increased job satisfaction.

Increasing perceptions of safety and decreasing fear of crime:

- Evidence suggests that community policing can increase perceptions of safety and decrease the fear of crime.

Reducing crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour

- Evidence suggests that community policing can reduce disorder and anti-social behavior.

Strategies for Community Policing

Basically, there are three plans of action designed to achieve a long-term achievement of community policing (Aminu 2016). These include:

- Community Partnerships
- Organizational Transformation and
- Problem-Solving.

Community Partnerships: This consists the collaborative partnerships between the police and the individuals and organizations they serve to develop solutions to problems and increase trust in policing (Chene, 2012). For instance, it was instructed in the Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century policing (2015) that:

Community policing requires the active building of positive relationships with members of the community on an agency as well as on a personal basis. This can be done through assigning officers to geographic areas on a consistent basis so that through the continuity of assignment they have the opportunity to know the members of the community (p.42).

Similarly, Policing agencies are unlikely to be successful in creating partnerships to address violent crimes until they establish trusting relationships with the communities they serve. (Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro, 2013). The community policing strategies employed under this category include community assessments and engagement, and efforts to educate members of the public, private and non-profit communities. The strength of this strategy is the value of information collected from residents and other stakeholders about the issues and concerns of the community that can help inform policy activities that are best suited to address these concerns.

Organizational transformation: This involves the alignment of organizational management, structure, personnel and information systems to support community partnerships and collaborative/proactive problem-solving (Chene, 2012).

Problem-Solving: Problem-Solving is defined as the process of engaging in a proactive and systematic examination of identified problems to develop and rigorously evaluate effective responses. Problem-solving is new way of policing to address, not only the causes of crime and the fear of crime, but all quality of life and issues in the community.

Challenges of Implementing Community Policing Strategies

Community policing has a number of roles, such as indicated above, literature also shows a number of challenges for its implementation, (Chene, 2012). For example, we discussed the four barriers: the police officer; the resident/community; police culture; and specialized units detailing them as follows: Generally, implementation issues that have not been identified or resolved can affect the overall success of a community policing initiative. Indeed, a range of barriers to successful implementation could impact on the potential benefits of community policing. Chene, (2012) posited that some of the possible consequences of poor implementation include lack of control, flexibility, and tailoring at neighbourhood level; not recognizing the historical lack of trust between police and certain communities; lack of good quality information about crime in the communities.

More specifically, on the side of police officers, they may work independent of the community in identifying and solving problems; training in problem solving and community engagement can be neglected and community police officers may lack performance measures (Aminu, 2016). On the part of the residents/communities, their ambiguity with different values and expectations; agencies promotion of conflicting values; ownership of problems often allocated to police rather than the whole community; low participation being affected by individualism and lack of social capital and limited community voice to the vocal minority.

With respect to the police culture, resistance to community policing is attributed to the perception. It is a move

away from traditional law enforcement practices to a 'softer' style of policing; the community can be disempowered when offering solutions if Police dominate as the crime and disorder experts. Indeed, Police are still reluctant to share information with the community. Other challenges also emanate from specialized units. As a result, isolation of officers can limit effectiveness while allocation of extra resources to community policing teams and special conditions of work can create internal friction.

Conclusion

Community policing is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime. The number of police in the country is not enough to cater for the security challenges in the country, especially in the rural communities where members of such communities depend totally on farming to meet their basic needs. It is important to note that the rural communities in Nigeria are the major producers of foods and crops being consumed by the general populace which means that the security of both lives and properties must be guaranteed if the problem of food scarcity should not surface. Security of lives and properties is also a serious determinant of rapid economic growth and overall development of any nation. This implies that security agencies in Nigeria have serious contributions to make in the economic advancement of the nation but since it has become obvious that security agencies cannot protect the citizenry alone, all hands must be on deck to achieve this. It

is based on this that the following recommendations are made:

- Community members must be re-oriented on the need for them to partner with the police force in their community to ensure adequate protection of lives and properties of community.
- Members of police force should be enlightened on the principles and practices of community policing to enable them embrace it.
- There should be regular meetings between police and community members to enable them update each other with necessary security information and to jointly take critical decision regarding the security of community members.

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